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ABSTRACT

A concise overview is presented for those seeking information regarding continuing education in nursing. The following questions are discussed: What is continuing education? Why is continuing education necessary? What is the official position of the American Nurses' Association regarding continuing education? Who is responsible for continuing education? Why is compatibility between state continuing education systems necessary? What are the components of a state continuing education system that facilitate interstate transferability of individual continuing education records? How is continuing education measured? Who is eligible to participate in the CEARP? A glossary of terms that must be utilized in order to have compatible systems is provided. Publications available from the American Nursing Association that relate to continuing education for nurses are listed. (SW)

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American Nurses' Association

Continuing Education in Nursing

An Overview

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CONTENTS

What Is Continuing Education? 1

Why Is Continuing Education Necessary? 1

What Is the Official Position of the American Nurses' Association Regarding Continuing Education? 1

Who Is Responsible for Continuing Education? 2

Why Is Compatibility Between State Continuing Education Systems Necessary? 5

What Are the Components of a State Continuing Education System which Facilitate Interstate Transferability of Individual Continuing Education Records? 5

How Is Continuing Education Measured? 7

Who Is Eligible to Participate in the CEARP (Voluntary and Mandatory)? 7

Glossary 8

Documents Available from ANA which Relate to Continuing Education for Nurses 9

CONTINUING EDUCATION IN NURSING: AN OVERVIEW

This document is designed to provide a concise overview for those seeking information regarding continuing education in nursing. The document highlights some basic aspects of continuing education for nursing and includes a list of publications of the American Nurses' Association pertinent to continuing education.

What Is Continuing Education?

Continuing Education is defined by the American Nurses' Association as planned learning experiences beyond a basic nursing education program. These experiences are designed to promote the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the enhancement of nursing practice, thus improving health care to the public.[1]

Why Is Continuing Education Necessary?

Nurses are accountable to the public, and changes affecting nursing practice demand constant effort by nurses to maintain competency. Continuing education provides one means by which nurses can maintain their competence and meet the standards of nursing practice.[2]

What Is the Official Position of the American Nurses' Association Regarding Continuing Education?

The American Nurses' Association has the commitment to "foster high standards of nursing practice, promote the professional and educational advancement of nurses and promote the welfare of nurses to the end that all people may have better care."[3] One of the ways this commitment is fulfilled is through the development of standards for continuing education in nursing and devising methods for gaining their acceptance and implementation through appropriate channels.

The action of the 1974 ANA House of Delegates directs ANA to provide support to those states which choose to establish continuing education as one prerequisite for relicensure as well as to those states which choose

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[1]American Nurses' Association Council on Continuing Education, *Standards for Continuing Education in Nursing* (Kansas City, Missouri: American Nurses' Association, 1975).

[2]American Nurses' Association Congress for Nursing Practice, *Standards of Nursing Practice* (Kansas City, Missouri: American Nurses' Association, 1973). Standards are also available in the following areas of nursing practice: Cardiovascular, Community Health, Emergency, Geriatric, Maternal and Child Health, Medical-Surgical, Operating Room, Orthopedic, and Psychiatric and Mental Health.

[3]American Nurses' Association, *Bylaws*, (Kansas City, Missouri: American Nurses' Association, 1974).

to encourage continuing education through a voluntary program.[4] The delegate action directs ANA to:

1. Provide support to state systems either voluntary or mandatory;
2. Assure the quality of continuing education activities;
3. Establish a system which will facilitate interstate transferability for nurses, irrespective of the approach selected by individual states.

The *Standards for Continuing Education in Nursing* are applicable to both a mandatory and a voluntary system and are the means by which the quality of the continuing education activities is assessed.

Who Is Responsible for Continuing Education?

A variety of persons and groups are responsible for continuing education in nursing. Some responsibilities are specific to different persons or groups; other responsibilities overlap. Cooperation between and among the individuals and groups is vital to facilitate the development of and participation in continuing education activities. The following are responsibilities delineated for individuals, employers, sponsors, state nurses' associations, and the American Nurses' Association.

The Individual

Ultimate responsibility for continuing education rests with the individual to:

1. Identify personal continuing education needs;
2. Make learning needs known to the appropriate sources;
3. Take the initiative in seeking continuing education activities to meet identified needs;
4. Evaluate continuing education activities;
5. Share the information obtained from the continuing education activities with colleagues;
6. Seek ways to apply new knowledge and skills in practice;
7. Initiate and maintain a record of continuing education activities;
8. Accept responsibility for financing continuing education activities.

The Employer

The employer carries a responsibility to the health care recipient to promote continuing education for nursing personnel and should fulfill this responsibility by:

1. Establishing and publicizing policies related to continuing education participation by personnel;
2. Assisting personnel in the identification of learning needs;
3. Providing opportunities for learning experiences based upon established guidelines;

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[4]American Nurses' Association Commission on Nursing Education, "Interpretation of Action Taken at 1974 ANA House of Delegates" (Kansas City, Missouri: American Nurses' Association, January 22, 1975).

4. Making available time and/or finances for staff to attend continuing education offerings outside the institution or agency when appropriate;
5. Assisting in the implementation and application of concepts and knowledge obtained through continuing education activities, when appropriate;
6. Providing opportunities for nurses to share with colleagues information gained from continuing education activities;
7. Providing recognition for participation in continuing education activities;
8. Evaluating the changes in performance resulting from continuing education;
9. Evaluating the quality of health care to the recipient resulting from the participation of the nursing personnel in continuing education.

Sponsor

Sponsors of continuing education, e.g. organizations and health and educational institutions, have a responsibility to:

1. Assess continuing education needs and translate these needs into organized learning experiences;
2. Design and implement continuing education offerings;
3. Collaborate with other professionals in health and related fields in the development of continuing education opportunities for nurses and others in the health field;
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of their offerings through learner achievement of objectives,
5. Establish accurate and retrievable continuing education records;
6. Utilize existing research, where appropriate, and generate new research in the field of continuing education.

State Nurses' Associations (SNAs)

Each state nurses' association has the responsibility to:

1. Utilize ANA standards and guidelines in the development of its voluntary and/or mandatory Continuing Education Approval and Recognition Program (CEARP);[4]
2. Develop criteria for program development and approval consistent with national standards and guidelines;

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[4]American Nurses' Association Council on Continuing Education, *Continuing Education in Nursing: Guidelines for State Voluntary and Mandatory Systems* (Kansas City, Missouri: American Nurses' Association, 1975).

3. Determine the number of contact hours to be required in that state. A minimum of 30 hours per year is recommended;
4. Devise methods for assuring the quality of the Continuing Education Approval and Recognition Program in that state;
5. Work collaboratively with its districts, other organizations, institutions, state educational systems, and agencies both public and private to achieve the continuing education goals of SNAs;
6. Encourage employers of nurses to provide for continuing education;
7. Assess the need for, as well as the availability and accessibility of, continuing education opportunities;
8. Encourage the development of quality continuing education activities throughout the state;
9. Assist in the planning and sponsoring of continuing education offerings;
10. Evaluate the effectiveness of its CEARP in terms of the stated objectives;
11. Disseminate information about continuing education offerings;
12. Work collaboratively with districts, other organizations, institutions, state educational systems, and agencies both public and private to promote adequate state appropriations and other funding for conducting continuing education, as well as promote legislation for funding of continuing education.

American Nurses' Association

The ANA has the responsibility to:

1. Establish standards for continuing education;
2. Develop guidelines for staff development education units within health care agencies and the relationship to continuing education;
3. Define the relationship of staff development programs to continuing education;
4. Assist the state nurses' associations to plan and initiate Continuing Education Approval and Recognition Programs;
5. Design a system to evaluate the effects of continuing education offerings on nursing practice;
6. Provide consultation service;
7. Promote the competence of all who are licensed to practice nursing through the development and implementation of standards of nursing practice;
8. Promote legislation for funding of continuing education;
9. Develop a national data system for continuing education in nursing;
10. Develop and implement a model and mechanism for national accreditation of continuing education in nursing.

Why Is Compatibility Between State Continuing Education Systems Necessary?

All states and territories are at different stages in developing continuing education systems, both mandatory and voluntary. Whether a state has a mandatory or voluntary continuing education system, it is imperative that there be compatibility between the systems in order to:

1. Enable recognition of continuing education offerings/programs which have been approved by continuing education systems accreditated by the ANA National Accreditation Board for Continuing Education.
2. Facilitate the review and transfer of individual continuing education records from state to state;
3. Facilitate ANA certification applications by providing a commonly understood record of continuing education activities;
4. Facilitate the review of records for individuals whose continuing education activities take place in more than one state;
5. Facilitate recognition of nurses who are licensed in one state, but whose practice and continuing education activities are in other states or outside the United States, e.g. federal employees and members of the armed forces;
6. Provide a basis for data accumulation about continuing education for research purposes;
7. Promote acceptance of continuing education as a process of life-long learning;
8. Provide a common framework for those states which may establish legislative requirements for continuing education.

What Are The Components of a State Continuing Education System which Facilitate Interstate Transferability of Individual Continuing Education Records?

To provide transferability of continuing education records among states, acceptance of these components for compatibility is important: (1) common terminology as defined in the glossary at the end of this document; (2) ANA criteria for approval of continuing education offerings;* and (3) common categories of required or recognized activities.

Attention to the following will facilitate the transferability of continuing education records.

1. State nurses' association programs are referred to as Continuing

*American Nurses' Association Council on Continuing Education, *Continuing Education in Nursing: Guidelines for State Voluntary and Mandatory Systems* (Kansas City, Missouri: American Nurses Association, 1975)

Education Approval and Recognition Programs. Where mandatory continuing education requirements exist, the State Board of Nursing may designate the SNA as the official approval organization for continuing education offerings and programs within that state.

2. Recognition is provided for:
   a) Noncredit organized learning experiences which meet the ANA *Standards for Continuing Education in Nursing.* These learning experiences include:
      (1) Offerings sponsored by universities or colleges;
      (2) Continuing education activities within staff development programs in agencies and institutions;
      (3) Education offerings of voluntary health agencies or professional organizations;
      (4) Self-instructional programs.
   b) Academic study for credit in nursing or related fields which will assist in maintaining competence or improving nursing practice.

3. It is recommended that the SNA establish a minimum of 30 contact hours per year of continuing education for its Continuing Education Approval and Recognition Program. At the present time, this appears reasonable considering the available educational opportunities. Experience may indicate the need for reassessment of this recommendation.

4. A statewide committee appointed by the SNA approves offerings and/or programs following standards set forth in *Continuing Education in Nursing: Guidelines for State Voluntary and Mandatory Systems,* including offerings in continuing education of an interdisciplinary nature.

   Utilization of national standards should facilitate the mobility which nurses now enjoy. Informal educational activities conducted outside of organized channels and without recognizable sponsorship or instruction do not lend themselves to uniform measurement. These informal educational activities include selected and general reading, exposure to the communications media, travel, films, discussion groups, attendance at meetings, organizational and committee membership, or community and social activities. Some states presently give "points" for the above listed items; however, points awarded for these activities are generally not transferable into contact hours or from state to state.

5. A system of record keeping for continuing education activities is developed and maintained by the SNA. A means of documentation of an individual's effort is necessary to provide evidence that the nurse has met the pre-established requirements. Sponsors of offerings must also have a record-keeping system. A uniform measure such as con-

tact hour or continuing education unit (CEU) is needed to provide uniform records.

6. The CEARP is self-sustained financially. Experiences of SNAs to date suggest that the total cost of this activity exceeds the organization's ability to finance it through the dues structure; therefore, a fee schedule should be developed for individuals and sponsors of continuing education activities. The basic program of the SNA is supported in a large part by fees paid by members. Differential fees for nonmembers are justified, in that nonmembers do not share in the basic administrative costs and in the support of the organization activities that make the continuing education program possible.

How Is Continuing Education Measured?

A standard unit of measurement provides a uniform system for measuring, recording, reporting, transferring, and recognizing participation in educational offerings which do not carry academic credit. The American Nurses' Association recommends the contact hour as the basic unit of measurement for continuing education in nursing. A contact hour is a unit of measurement which describes fifty minutes of an approved, organized learning experience.

It is recognized that some providers have adopted the continuing education unit (CEU) as the standard of measurement. By definition, the CEU is equivalent to ten contact hours "In an organized, non-credit continuing education experience under responsible sponsorship, capable direction, and qualified instruction." The CEU can be converted to contact hours in the following manner: 1 CEU = 10 contact hours. Contact hours earned through attendance at academic courses for credit cannot be converted to CEUs. Providers who use the CEU as a unit of measurement must adhere to the criteria outlined by the National Task Force for the Development of the CEU.

Who Is Eligible to Participate in the CEARP? (Voluntary and Mandatory)

All nurses—members and nonmembers of an SNA—are eligible to participate. In a voluntary system, those who are not members of the American Nurses' Association may be eligible for participation in the CEARP at the discretion of the SNA. In a state where continuing education is a requirement for the re-registration of licensure, all currently licensed nurses in the particular state must participate in the continuing education program designated by the licensing agency.

Glossary

The following definitions of terms must be utilized in order to have compatible systems:

Approved—Refers to review and acceptance for a specific number of contact hours based on predetermined criteria by the appropriate body, e.g. SNA review committee.

Contact Hour—A unit of measurement which describes fifty minutes of an approved organized learning experience.

Continuing Education—Planned learning experiences beyond a basic nursing educational program. These experiences are designed to promote the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the enhancement of nursing practice, thus improving health care to the public.

Continuing Education Approval and Recognition Program—A voluntary system established and provided by the SNA to:

1. Implement standards for continuing education;
2. Review continuing education programs/offerings;
3. Maintain records of continuing education;
4. Recognize the continuing education achievements of individual nurses.

Continuing Education Sponsored by Universities or Colleges—Specific educational offerings, separate from basic or graduate nurse curricula. They generally are organized within a continuing education or extension service under the direction of a designated individual.

Continuing Education within Staff Development—An organized planned program under direction of the staff development educator in which learning experiences are designed to build upon the previously-acquired knowledge and skills of the learner. Independent endeavor is encouraged on the part of the learner. Only activities in the continuing education component qualify for the continuing education contact hours.

Continuing Education Unit (CEU)—Ten contact hours of participation in an organized continuing education experience which meets the criteria established by the National Task Force including sponsorship, capable direction, and qualified instruction. A unit of measurement assigned by the sponsor.

Educational Offering—One segment of a continuing education program or a series of learning experiences dealing with specific content (a single continuing education offering).

Educational Offerings of Voluntary Health Agencies or Professional Organizations—An organized learning experience which may be held in conjunction with organizational meetings or which may be presented separately.

In-Service Education—An instructional or training program provided by an employing agency in the work setting which is designed to increase competence in a specific area of practice. In-service education is one aspect of staff development, but the terms are not interchangable.

Organized Learning Experiences—Activities which have preplanned educational objectives, instructional methods, content or subject matter, clientele to be served, and evaluation methods.

Orientation—The means by which new staff members are introduced to the philosophy, goals, policies, procedures, role expectations, physical facilities, and special services in a specific work setting. Orientation occurs at the time of employment and precedes changes in any of the above during employment in a specific work setting.

Program—Planned, organized effort directed toward accomplishing major objectives. A program includes many segments which are described as educational offerings or courses (total continuing education programs).

Recognition Point—A unit of measurement assigned to activities other than organized continuing education.

Self-Instructional Activities—Independent, individual learning activities which are organized to meet clearly defined objectives and which are evaluated. Such an activity may need to be coordinated under the guidance of a responsible person in continuing education or staff development. Contact hours must be based on equivalent class hours, as determined by the state nurses' association's CEARP Review Committee or the State Board of Nursing. The assessment of the eligibility of the self-instructional activities is the responsibility of the approving organization.

Sponsor (often called provider)—The institution, organization, or agency responsible for the development, implementation, evaluation, and record-keeping of a continuing education offering or a total continuing education program.

Staff Development—A term describing the total process which includes both formal and informal learning opportunities. The focus of the process is on assisting individuals to perform competently in fulfillment of role expectations within a specific agency. Resources both within and outside the agency are utilized to facilitate the process.

Documents Available from ANA which Relate to Continuing Education for Nurses

1. *Accreditation of Continuing Education in Nursing*, COE-4, $2.50.
2. *Continuing Education in Nursing: Guidelines for State Voluntary and Mandatory Systems*, COE-9, 1975, $2.00.
3. *Guidelines for Staff Development*, COE-11, $1.00.
4. *Standards for Continuing Education in Nursing*. COE-8, 1975—$1.00.